

# ‘For the Greater Glory of God and the More Universal Good’

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Thank you, Vice Chancellor, and thank you to all of you, particular thanks to Heythrop for doing me the honour of inviting me to come and speak on this very auspicious occasion. It’s a matter of real regret to me that I have not been able to attend more of this celebration and it always feels a little odd to be coming in to conclude something whose beginnings you haven’t witnessed. So, the equal and opposite dangers of saying what has been said by everybody and saying something in contradiction to what has been said by somebody are very much in mind as I stand to speak this evening.

What I wish to offer is a few basic reflections on three or four fundamental and distinctive elements in the Jesuit approach to education from the very beginning, because of course an approach to education has been an intrinsic part of the Jesuit identity from the start. The *Constitutions* of the Society make it abundantly clear that education is taken for granted as something that everyone is involved in, in one way or another – not only through the provision of education for others but also in the notion of a sustained educating process in which the brothers of the Society themselves are involved.

The first aspect that strikes me reading the *Constitutions* is how education for the model Jesuit is seen as a very simple and very natural extension of the process of formation. So the life of the community which shapes brothers in a certain way towards a certain end is what remains the heart and the foundation of any enterprise that goes beyond the life of the Society as such. As editors and translators have pointed out, the word *scholaris* is used in the *Constitutions* both for Jesuit scholastics and for students in general; and the translator for the *Classics of Western Spirituality* edition<sup>1</sup> clearly feels the need to make some distinctions in the translation which, while helpful, rather obscure the fact that there is something of a real continuity being taken for granted which is lost if you use two different words; and so that is the first principle which I think is worth reflecting on.

Education, and not least university education, is the extension of a process of formation in the community: it naturally spills over from that process of learning to be in community. But it is this basic principle which I think makes sense of a second fundamental element in the Jesuit approach from the start. There is a great deal of

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<sup>1</sup> *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, edited by George E Ganss SJ (New York/Mahwah, Paulist Press 1991), subsequent references are to this edition.

emphasis from those early days of the Society on the provision of education without expense or with minimal expense, to those 'external' to the community who are being educated. When colleges are set up, as Ignatius himself says in his letter to Antonio de Araoz, 'parents are relieved of the expense of having teachers to instruct their children in letters and virtue' and thus 'fulfil their duty in conscience regarding their children's formation'. 'Persons who would have difficulty finding enough to pay teachers to whom they could entrust their children, will find them in these colleges with complete security'.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the provision of education is, you might say, not a commodity but a ministry. Hence regarding it as a profit making enterprise cannot be anywhere near the heart of what it is about; it is not even a 'contracted' service, it is part of the evangelical mission of the community to extend its own reflection and its own development freely and without charge to others.

And a third fundamental element, significant but not perhaps so theologically basic as what we have just been talking about, is a keen sense of the need to balance a set of universal standards and goals with an awareness of local priorities as affecting the detail of practice. Ignatius himself observes (it may seem obvious but it still needs saying) that what you eat, what you wear and when you get up are going to look rather different in different climates and environments; and the timetable of the day, even the way in which you structure a particular course of study, is going to depend on quite a lot of factors which are local and not universal and uniform, so that in addition to being a ministry, a process of

formation, it is a process of formation grounded in a constant recovery of deep attention to the particulars of the social and temporal situation. Formation, ministry, attention – these are arguably the three abidingly significant principles in setting Ignatius' vision – I prefer not to say philosophy – of education. Why not philosophy of education? Because I believe Ignatius has a theology of educating, and that's a little different, in ways that I hope may become clear in the rest of what I have to say.

To go back for a moment to that first principle about formation, this rests on an assumption that the ultimate point of education is that we should be able to live as God purposes us to live, that we realise our ultimate end. Education is either about becoming what we are finally meant to be or it is about nothing; and this theological principle resonates throughout the *Constitutions* and throughout Ignatius' letters on the subject. Our formation is formation in humanity, the three dimensional humanity which God has created in God's own image. And that of course means that whatever happens within the education of the community is material for the ultimate end.

For example, relations between teacher and student and the character of those relations are not accidental or indifferent. Getting this right is an intrinsic part of educating, because what's in view is formation in community towards an ultimate human end which is life in justice, in love, in community. Hence Ignatius' attention to the way in which teachers and older brethren take responsibility for the spiritual maturity and discipline of others, not just in order to keep order but because that is a part of an intrinsic, integral picture of how a community grows and what it is

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<sup>2</sup> Ganss *op cit* p.365

for. This idea that relations between teacher and taught are intrinsic to the educational process is one which needs underlining, because it hasn't always been taken for granted (I was struck to hear the Vice Chancellor mentioning how significant it is that Heythrop maintains the tradition of close personal relation between teacher and taught, not simply as a kind of softening or humanising element, a selling point, but as part of what it is to educate). And this, of course, leads me to suspect that the Jesuit institution as envisaged by Ignatius and the first generation of Jesuit educators is always going to be a 'school of the Lord's service'; very much like Benedict's monastery, which is described in the Benedictine *Rule* in exactly those terms: a school of service because it is the nature of the mutual relationships which does the real educating and the real forming.

So the Jesuit educational institution is one in which shared responsibility and shared involvement in growth in humanity towards God's purposes for humanity are at the centre of what is envisaged. But we can go a little further than that and pick up what is, by common consent, a very significant but slightly unexpected feature of what Ignatius and others have to say about education.

The whole approach of the *Constitutions* and the letters takes it for granted that all kinds of study are ultimately part of what will fulfil your ultimate end. In other words, being a good engineer, lawyer or linguist can be part of fulfilling the image of God in you. It's not just a natural skill which is neither here nor there, it is part of exercising that dimension of the image of God which has to do with your intellect, your capacity to see clearly, to reason, to plan, to hope intelligently; and Ignatius is clear that both humane letters and the natural sciences are part of that.

Studying these subjects with attention, with excellence, with focus and concentration is not an end in itself; but doing these things well is intrinsic to laying the ground for theology. This, of course, cuts two ways. On the one hand, all these rather diverse areas of human intellectual excellence are believed to have something to do with growth into an adult, intelligent, responsible participation in the divine life: 'theology' in its fullest sense. On the other hand, theology itself is shown to be involved inextricably with intellectual excellence; it cannot cut itself off from the whole process of human intellectual enquiry. The worst thing we can possibly do for either the academic disciplines in general or theology in particular would be to drive a wedge between these things so that they have nothing to do with each other.

So we find in the *Constitutions* that 'since the arts or natural sciences dispose the intellectual powers for theology, and are useful for the perfect understanding and use of it, and also by their own nature help toward the same ends, they should be treated with fitting diligence'.<sup>3</sup>

Once again the arts and the natural sciences give some exercise – not just five-finger exercise either – to a mind which is beginning to open itself up to theology, so that in a sense the very subject matter of humane letters and sciences has to do with laying the groundwork for theology. To put it in very simple terms, thinking theologically is not some isolated, sanitised, protected form of thinking, it is thinking, good thinking. And how do you learn good thinking? By good teaching about a whole variety of things. And the 'risk', Ignatius seems to imply, is that there is something

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<sup>3</sup> Ganss *op cit* 12.#450, p.299

about good thinking which, like it or not, sooner or later leaves the door open into theology. It has to do with living out what God expects from God's human creatures. So, excellence in these various intellectual disciplines is not going to be an end in itself, but the ground for theology. Doing all these things superlatively well, with as much attention and diligence as humanly possible, becomes part of preparing the possibility of theology – which in turn of course, for Ignatius, is to do with preparing the ground for mission.

So the task of the teacher in the Jesuit institution is two-fold. As we have seen, it involves the nurture of common spiritual life but it also involves a kind of instruction that leaves open paths to the theological future. That is quite a challenge: it certainly doesn't mean bolting on some theological extras to every single course, trying to be pious while you are doing your chemistry. Ignatius would have said – if we can guess on the basis of some of his related remarks – that being pious while doing your chemistry is one way of not doing good chemistry and that the proper way of exercising your piety is to be a good chemist.

So, it is not about an extra element added on, not about edifying remarks around the edges, but about penetrating to that level of depth, complexity and excitement in your intellectual activity which (whether you fully realise it or not) is exposing your mind to theology; it is understanding something about how extraordinary the intellectual life is – and you never know just what might surprise you as providing raw material for the intellectual life.

The contemporary atheist or agnostic scientist from central casting might well feel that this was a little unexpected; but I don't

think Ignatius would have felt disposed to apologise at all. It would be perfectly fair to say that the more your mind is accustomed to the richness and complexity that intellectual life delivers, the more you are – know it or not, like it or not – being disposed to something larger than simply that particular discipline. So we have a picture of the double task of the teacher – nurture, formation, but also teaching the kind of depth, the kind of animating complexity, which will so excite the vision of what human, mental life and spiritual, imaginative life are about, that something begins to open up which is more than just any one of the disciplines that are addressed in the education programme.

To put it like that does allow us to say that even in the dramatically different environment of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some of these principles are still readily understandable. Any institution these days, whether it calls itself Christian or not, Jesuit or not, is going to be unimaginably more diverse than any group that Ignatius could have imagined; and yet that dual task of the teacher, formation in community and in responsibility combined with commitment to open-ended and deep intellectual endeavour, this remains a vision and an ideal that is not in the least dated.

We might pick up a remark that Ignatius makes in that same letter to Antonio de Araoz which I quoted earlier, when he speaks of how the foundation of a Jesuit college will provide lots of candidates for important public jobs: 'From among those who are at present merely students, in time some will emerge to play diverse roles – some to preach and carry on the care of souls, others to the government of the land and the administration of justice, and others to other responsible occupations. In short, since the children of today become

the adults of tomorrow, their good formation in life and learning will benefit many others'.<sup>4</sup> The implication of that, which I think is well worth pausing on, is that a future in public life of some kind, teaching, government or whatever, actually requires these foundations of intellectual depth; it is not a disadvantage for a judge or a teacher or a politician to have an intellectual hinterland. On the contrary, it is a massive disadvantage not to have an intellectual hinterland. We may draw the moral as we wish for our own context; but the point is that for these public ministries and public services, Ignatius simply assumes that it is good to be able to think.

And ultimately this means that the lawyer, the politician, the teacher, and those who exercise other responsible positions have to have some element in their work, some element in their awareness, relating to their 'last end', to that final horizon that has to do with what it is like to be human in the presence and the purpose of God. No-one can, ultimately, do a satisfactory job as teacher, politician or lawyer without some awareness of what human beings are for.

This cluster of ideas, very deeply grounded in these remarks of Ignatius surely offer one of the most substantial challenges which the Ignatian vision can pose to both education and politics today. It's intriguing that in recent years we have seen more and more books about our social crises and our international tangles rather wistfully saying that what we haven't got is a credible and coherent doctrine of what is good for human beings as such and that without that we will constantly be condemned to a kind of hamster-wheel-like circularity – short term problem-solving without any robust

awareness of what a good human life looks like.

That's expressed most clearly in the excellent recent book by Robert and Edward Skidelsky, *How Much is Enough?*,<sup>5</sup> which attempts to retrieve the Aristotelian sense of the good life as key to understanding the financial and social crises we currently face. In short, the active and responsible citizen, perhaps most visible in law or government or teaching but far more widely spread, needs a vision of what humanity is for; and if that vision is somewhere in the background, then the connection between intellectual life, socially committed engagement, and religious faith becomes a lot easier to see and defend. When that connection fractures, it's not entirely surprising if various kinds of nonsense come to prevail, in Church and society alike (not to mention the academy).

As we saw earlier, education in Ignatius's view is not a commodity, not even a contract, it is the overflow, the extension, of the process of formation. The Ignatian college is, before anything else, a cell of the body of Christ, and like all cells of the body of Christ it educates and enlarges by participation, not just by instruction at a distance. You can't really do Ignatian education primarily online (with due acknowledgement to the immense and transforming importance of online access and outreach – but it needs relation-building however sophisticated its techniques). As I have said already, education by participation doesn't mean that the university or college as a cell of the body of Christ is a place of ubiquitous and obtrusive piety: Ignatius is nothing if not

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<sup>4</sup> Ganss *op cit* p.365

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Skidelsky and Edward Skidelsky, *How Much Is Enough? Money and the Good Life* (Other Press, New York 2012)

realistic about the limited time the devotional exercises should take up in the life of the student (though I should perhaps add that what he thinks is a limited time for devotional exercise would be for most of us quite generous). The point he is making is that, as we saw earlier, the theological or spiritual dimension is not an extra or a competitor; doing the intellectual work properly is intrinsic to the devotional life. Concentrate on what you now have to do – that is study or teach; and do so within the framework of an intentional community whose entire vision, whose global vision, you might say, is bound up with the quality of a common life in which you are learning to be a human being with your ultimate end in view. It was not a Jesuit but a Benedictine headmaster who famously said in response to a question in the mid-twentieth century about the purpose of his school that he intended to teach his boys to die. Perhaps that's putting it rather more starkly than some of the early Jesuit material does; yet there is something in that which is worth saying. The community's intention is to create the likeness of Christ, to create sacrificial service; it is to explode and remove from the scene all models of commodification and contract in the process of sharing that human good which is education.

And this, I believe, is the crucial point in what this tradition has to say to us at the moment. What this entire model of education proposes is something which requires us to resist diverse sorts of narrowing of the educational enterprise, the narrowing which doesn't allow us to think of what is humanly good, the narrowing which doesn't allow us to think of the depth at which the intellect becomes excited and engaged, the narrowing which removes the educational process from the creative interaction, the necessary friction if

you like, of human relationship. And we all know how easy it is in the short-term, financially anxious social climate we inhabit to assume that education should be more like these narrowed versions than the Ignatian model.

Appropriating and making contemporary this Ignatian picture is something which potentially has enormous critical edge in the kind of society we live in. It has to do really with what we think the intellectual life is, how seriously we think of ourselves, how we grasp our own humanity as an intellectual enterprise.

The word 'intellectual' terrifies a lot of people, or perhaps provokes a mockery to conceal terror. Paul Johnson some years ago wrote a book called *Intellectuals*<sup>6</sup> which was mostly about misbehaviour in the bedrooms of famous and clever people. Not difficult; but we need to do a little bit better than that.

The intellect, the human capacity to welcome the other intelligently into one's own identity and be welcomed in and by the other, the emptying and fulfilling which is historically part of how theologians see the life of intellect – this is simply an aspect of our humanity, not a luxury, not an eccentricity. And if we take seriously this kind of vision, part of the task we take away from a celebration like this is the task of rehabilitating the intellectual. Ignatius encourages us to do this by suggesting that the more excited you get about the various disciplines in the life of the mind, the more open the life of your mind is likely to be to its Maker; which means that, whatever else is said about intellectual or academic study, it is not trivial, not marginal, but part of the

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals* (Harper Row, New York 1988)

enterprise of spiritual maturation and discipleship.

Of course – to go back to another very basic principle – this is not for Ignatius something for a few clerical specialists. The very notion of the life of a Jesuit college, as it were, overflowing to draw others in, external students lay and clerical, reminds us that part of the vision that permeates Ignatius' writings is of an educated and well equipped laity. He has some very interesting things to say in his letter to Pelletier<sup>7</sup> about how much it matters that lay people are able to give a reason for their faith and argue effectively, with sceptics, heretics, enemies of the faith. The use of the intellect is, once again, seen as intrinsic to faithfulness, to the effective following of Christ; and an educated laity is essential for the well-being of the Church. One can perhaps overdo the novelty of this principle in the sixteenth century: there had been educated laity for a millennium and a half in the Christian Church. In the Eastern Christian world, there had never been the kind of break there was in the West after the fall of the Roman Empire in the preparation and education of professional lay people in public office. But what Ignatius does is to put this firmly and explicitly at the foundation of his theology of educating. Christian people need to be stretched, they need to be excited and engaged about their thinking capacity, and this is for the good of the Church and for the good of the society they serve: for the good of the Church, because it means that people will not dumbly fail to respond to the challenges of faith that will arise; for the good of the society they serve because it provides the intellectual hinterland which we thought about earlier on.

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<sup>7</sup> Ganss *op cit* pp.356-61

So these reflections are designed to try and draw out just a little how the Ignatian vision of education, not least university education, has its roots in a basic theological question: How do we live in the light of our ultimate end? How do we become more deeply human in the ways God wants us to be and has made us capable of being? How also do we join up the different bits of our mental, spiritual, imaginative lives? How do we see the excitement and the fulfilment of all these areas of our humanity feeding in to the great stream of theological encounter with God? Ignatius believed that every aspect of the ministry of the Society of Jesus had to do, sooner or later, with realising the image of God in human beings and this perhaps is what holds together every single policy, every single initiative, of the Society that he founded. What is fresh and challenging from our perspective is to see how this plays itself out in thinking about the life of the mind, the discipleship of the mind, in a way which opens up critical questions for Church and society and allows us to rethink what it is that we need in public figures and responsible citizens, to see the need for 'hinterland' in such persons. How do we vivify all this with the same scope of critical challenge for society today?

The anniversary that we have been celebrating in the life of Heythrop College reminds us that this particular vision of education has been around for quite a long time and has been served and embodied faithfully and creatively in Heythrop by any number of hugely distinguished scholars, thinkers, theologians, writers. We know, in other words, that this can be done, that it has what we are now encouraged to call 'sustainability' built into it. We know this in the light of my third initial principle: this is an institution capable of flexibility, rethinking itself, enlarging itself, in exactly

the ways that Ignatius wanted to see in diverse contexts. And in Heythrop's most recent developments we have seen abundantly how the notion of an overflow of formation has lain behind so many new styles and new possibilities of learning. Heythrop remains deeply committed to an educated laity for the sake of the well-being of the Church (and I would add in brackets, unsurprisingly, the churches).

Heythrop remains deeply committed to the notion that enlarging the capacity of lay people enlarges the well-being of the society you are in. It is taken for granted, as Ignatius takes it for granted, that the laity are not passive partners in the work of the body of Christ or consumers of a theology cooked in somewhat remote kitchens by specialists who don't otherwise talk to them. If institutions of theological education and general education are able to go on nourishing that kind of deep attention, that quality of relationship and of interaction between disciplines and between persons, then I think that the anniversary we celebrate today represents some very good news for the Church and the society we're in. I believe that those who have joined together to affirm that celebration in these last couple of days believe this is indeed what Heythrop has done and is doing and, by the grace of God, will do.

And in conclusion, it means that our challenge is to become constantly, repeatedly, a learning Church, a Church which is committed always to being questioned – not just questioning but being questioned by that which calls it into being. And if we are indeed a learning Church, perhaps we may make a different kind of contribution to being a learning society, that is, a society which is constantly open to being questioned, not confident that the fashion of the day is the right answer, growing together in understanding of a humanity which, if it is indeed in the image of the invisible God, is as properly inexhaustible and exhilarating as God himself. That is the theological vision by which Heythrop is animated; long may it continue.

*Rowan Williams (born 1950) studied at Cambridge and Oxford Universities was ordained priest of the Anglican church in 1978; appointed Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Oxford in 1986; Bishop of Monmouth (1992), Archbishop of Wales (1999), Archbishop of Canterbury (2002-12); Dr Williams is currently Master of Magdalen College, Cambridge.*



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